

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON

HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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Postmaster General Megan Brennen
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza Promenade SW
Washington, D.C. 20590

Commissioner Kevin McAleenan
United States Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20229

Dear Postmaster General Brennen and Commissioner McAleenan:

As we have discussed, protecting the United States from the influx of dangerous and illicit drugs, like fentanyl, through the international mail system is essential to effectively combatting the opioid epidemic. That is why the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations has dedicated significant time and resources to investigating this issue. On January 29, 2018, the Subcommittee published a report titled *Combating the Opioid Crisis: Exploiting Vulnerabilities in International Mail* that detailed how easy it can be to ship illicit drugs to the United States. This report also found that the United States Postal Service (“USPS”) and the United States Customs and Border Protection (“CBP”) failed to prepare for the increase in package volume coming from foreign posts and did not make timely improvements to programs designed to target and locate packages suspected of containing illicit drugs.

More recently, the USPS and Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) Offices of Inspector General released two reports detailing your agencies’ continued failure to effectively secure incoming international mail. For example, the USPS OIG found that “there is currently no process in place to automatically locate and redirect suspected packages in the mailstream for inspection....Quickly identifying, isolating, and inspecting packages that may contain illicit drugs is crucial to prevent use of the postal network to distribute illegal drugs and protect postal employees from potentially dangerous exposure.”¹ The USPS OIG also found that international drug traffickers “have identified, in their marketing to customers, that they use the Postal Service to distribute illicit drugs.” Similar to the Subcommittee’s conclusions, the USPS OIG found that a **majority** of the drug sellers contacted on the internet explicitly instructed purchasers to use the Postal Service when shipping drugs internationally.

The DHS OIG report contained similarly troubling findings: “CBP has ineffective processes and IT security controls to support air mail inspection operations at JFK International

¹ United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General, SAT-AR-18-002, *Use of Postal Service Network to Facilitate Illicit Drug Distribution* (Sept. 28, 2018).

Airport.”² The DHS OIG found that CBP operations at JFK were only able to inspect a “limited number of the hundreds of thousands of pieces of incoming mail” at JFK per day. The OIG’s report also found that CBP has not updated its *International Mail Operations and Enforcement Handbook* since August 2001—rendering some of CBP’s guidance for handling increased in package volume insufficient. The Subcommittee’s report recommended that CBP should act swiftly to inform Congress of the staffing and technological resources needed to effectively expand their targeting efforts at International Service Centers.

As you know, last year, the President signed the Synthetics Trafficking and Overdose Prevention Act (“STOP Act”) into Public Law. The STOP Act requires USPS to provide advance electronic data on incoming foreign shipments, including basic information like the name and address of the shipper and recipient. Specifically, the law required USPS to provide this data on 70 percent of all packages mailed from foreign posts, including 100 percent of all packages mailed from China by December 31, 2018.³ However, USPS informed the Subcommittee that for January 2019, USPS only obtained data on 76 percent of packages shipped from China and only 57 percent of data on packages from all foreign posts.⁴ Further, USPS only received data on 52.8 percent of all international packages and 70.7 percent of packages from China for all of 2018.⁵ While this shows increased collection of advance electronic data from 2017,⁶ USPS failed to meet the statutory requirement.

We know how opioids are getting into this country and we know where the drugs are coming from. Efficient, effective, and secure operations at the major mail facilities that process inbound international mail are critical in stemming the flow of this poison. The Subcommittee will continue regular oversight on your agencies’ efforts to address the many vulnerabilities highlighted in the OIG reports as well as your agencies’ compliance with the reporting requirements outlined in the STOP Act. With that in mind, we request regular briefings and updates on the specific and detailed efforts your agencies must immediately implement to address these unacceptable vulnerabilities. These briefings should also include the plan to comply with STOP Act’s requirement to refuse any shipments without the required advance electronic data received after December 31, 2020.

Sincerely,



Rob Portman
Chairman
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations



Tom Carper
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

² United States Customs and Border Protection Office of Inspector General, OIG-18-83, *CBP’s International Mail Inspection Processes Need Improvement at JFK International Airport* (Sept. 24, 2018).

³ 19 U.S.C. §1415 (2019).

⁴ Email from USPS to Subcommittee staff (February 28, 2019).

⁵ Email from USPS to Subcommittee staff (March 19, 2019).

⁶ In 2017, USPS collected advance electronic data on 36.1 percent of 498,268,405 international packages shipped through the international mail system. See U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Staff Report, *Combatting the Opioid Crisis: Exploiting Vulnerabilities in International Mail* (Jan. 25, 2018).